

A person investigating the Bahai Faith had encountered theocratic ideas among the Bahais she met, and asked if these were correct, and where they came from.

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To: talisman9@yahoogleroups.com
Subject: UHJ claims
Date sent: Fri, 16 Feb 2007 14:44:21 +0100

On 15 Feb 2007 at 21:46, a person investigating the Bahai Faith wrote:

> I have to say that the idea of a one-world government run by a
> religious institution of any sort whatsoever, is what I can only
> call a total nightmare.
> I cannot believe for one second that this is what Bahauallah
> envisaged,

This is certainly not what Baha'u'llah envisioned!

How do you 'just know' that Baha'u'llah could not have taught this ? - because these are hair-brained delusions, and someone who speaks good sense most of the time, does not turn around and babble nonsense at the next breath. Common sense tells us that idiotic ideas come from idiots. With a bit of research, we can trace these ideas back, stand in the shoes of the idiots, and maybe understand them even if we cannot agree with them.

What Baha'u'llah says on this is clear:

" Kings are the manifestations of the power, and the daysprings of the might and riches, of God. Pray ye on their behalf. He hath invested them with the rulership of the earth and hath singled out the hearts of men as His Own domain. Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book. This is a decree of God in this Most Great Revelation. It is divinely preserved from annulment and is invested by Him with the splendour of His confirmation.

(Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 220)

There's a lot more in Baha'u'llah's writings about this. It is one of his main themes. The second part of the Kitab-i-Iqan, his main theological work, is devoted to the question. He includes it among the teachings he summarises in his Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, which

is a survey of his teachings that he wrote at the end of his life. Abd'ul-Baha wrote a whole book about the separation of religion and politics, and the disasters that happen when you mix them up: it is called the *Risaleh-ye Siyasiyyah*: my translation of it is called "the Sermon on the Art of Governance." Abdu'l-Baha often gave talks in which he listed the central Bahai teachings, and in about half of these he includes the separation of religion and politics as one of the key principles.

Nevertheless, most of the early Bahais in the West had the opposite view. In part this was due to a simple mistake. Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha had advocated a Supreme Tribunal to be composed by the nations of the world, and a House of Justice to be elected by the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies. When the French translation of *Some Answered Questions* was made (by Hippolyte Dreyfus, no relation of the famous Dreyfus in the Dreyfus Affair), he added footnotes where these terms were used, explaining that the Tribunal was the UHJ, and the UHJ the Tribunal. His French translation was then translated in English and German, along with the footnotes and the book was very influential. The footnotes were corrected in later editions, but the idea was already established.

But in my opinion the mix-up is more due to ordinary people's unthinking assumptions. From reading as much as I can of the early Bahai literature, it seems to me that various authors have come up with the idea of the union of church and state independently, because they explain how it could work in contradictory ways. It looks to me like this idea was just "in the air" and various Bahai authors picked it up as if it was so natural it required no argument, no reference to the scriptures.

Here's one example (I wrote a book on this, so if you want more, I have it). In *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Baha'u'llah wrote:

The sovereigns of the earth have been and are the manifestations of the power, the grandeur and the majesty of God. This Wronged One hath at no time dealt deceitfully with anyone. ... Regard for the rank of sovereigns is divinely ordained, as is clearly attested by the words of the Prophets of God and His chosen ones. He Who is the Spirit (Jesus) -- may peace be upon Him -- was asked: "O Spirit of God! Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?" And He made reply: "Yea, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." He forbade it

not. These two sayings are, in the estimation of men of insight, one and the same, for if that which belonged to Caesar had not come from God, He would have forbidden it. (Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 89)

Julie Chanler's translation of the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, from the French translation by Dreyfus, was published by the New York Baha'i Publishing Committee in 1928, and this section of it was cited in an article in *Star of the West* in 1933. So American Bahais ought to have known about "Render unto Caesar."

Horace Holley was one of the American Bahais: he was a member of the NSA in the USA from 1923, so we can assume that he would know the Epistle, would read the *Star of the West*, and would also have known that Abdu'l-Baha is reported to have cited and endorsed this verse in the popular and widely used (but unreliable) *Paris Talks* (page 158). (He could not have known that Abdu'l-Baha also explains and expands on this verse in his *Sermon on the Art of Governance*). In 1938, Horace Holley was writing the preface to a collection of Shoghi Effendi's letters, called "*The World Order of Baha'u'llah*." He writes (page vii):

the old conception of religion, which separated spirituality from the fundamental functions of civilization, compelling men to abide by conflicting principles of faith, of politics and of economics, has been forever destroyed. The command, "Render unto God that which is of God, and unto Caesar that which is of Caesar," has been annulled by the law of the oneness of humanity revealed by Baha'u'llah.

The background assumption is visible here: an ideal society would be unified and that does not permit church and state to be separate.

Not only did Holley himself apparently not notice that he was contradicting Bahai scripture, generations of Bahais after him also did not notice! The book was reprinted with these words at least until 1974, but thankfully they have been cut now.

In *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* itself, Shoghi Effendi had said:

Theirs is not the purpose, while endeavoring to conduct and perfect the administrative affairs of their Faith, to violate, under any circumstances, the provisions of their country's

constitution, much less to allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries.

(p. 65, or thereabouts (depending on your edition))

Three years after Holley's mistaken assertion in the Preface to WOB, Shoghi Effendi made a lengthy compilation of texts from Baha'u'llah regarding the position of kings and rulers. One of these quotations is this passage from Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, about Caesar. Since this comes just three years after Holley's mistake, it must surely be read as a repudiation and scriptural refutation, by Shoghi Effendi, of Holley's theories. Shoghi Effendi also wrote extensively about the supreme tribunal and the other organs of a world government, and *none* of these descriptions even mentions the Universal House of Justice.

The picture I have of the time is of Shoghi Effendi swimming valiantly against the tide, at first not realising that the mass of the believers in the US were theocratists believing in an eventual union of church and state, and then coming out roundly to refute these ideas. At the same time, he had to work with these people, they were the backbone and model for the Bahai administrative system he was establishing around the world, and the US administration was the main pillar of his plans for spreading the Bahai Faith to every country of the world.

This is not unexpected. When people become Bahais they naturally import many of their assumptions and hopes about "religion" and stick them onto the surface of Bahai, mistaking them for Bahai teachings. At one time, the Bahais in at least one city in America had a separate Assembly for Negroes. After all, Bahais believed in equality, did they not? And before we laugh too hard at them, remember that in other cities the blacks were simply excluded, not noticed, overlooked. Look at Christian history also - it took generations before something like the real teachings of Christ was distinguished from a mass of mystery cult imports and Judaic millennialism. When Christ said "my kingdom is not of this world" most of the Christians added "yet." They took Jewish millennial expectations of a messiah who would rule, attached them Christ who did not rule, and solved the difficulty by translating Christ's rule into their rule (the rule of the saints) and postponing it until the near future. The Bahais have done just the same, and just as people like Justin Martyr in the 3rd or 4th generation of Christianity began to realise that this was not Christ's teaching, so

some Bahais are now realising that Bahai teachings have to come from Bahai scriptures.

You make two good points about a union of church and state: history shows that it has always been a disaster (read the Sermon on the Art of Governance for Abdu'l-Baha's examples of this), and religious diversity is here to stay. The second of these would not have been obvious to the early American believers. America's domination by Christianity, and its history of revivalism, made it plausible for them to think of everyone converting to one religion in a world religious revival. We cannot imagine that today - geographic mobility and the increasing trend for people to leave and join religions of choice mean that every society on earth will, in the near future, become religiously diverse, and they will stay that way.

Naturally if only Bahais could participate in politics (by voting) while all Bahais were forbidden to participate in government (because of non-involvement in politics), the World Order would be a colossal disorder. That is not what Baha'u'llah taught.